

C A B O C L O S

I had been residing in Brazil more than a year when I first heard someone speak of some person as a Caboclo. Never having heard the word before, I inquired what sort of person was meant. It was an uneducated person who used the term; and due partly to the fact that my knowledge of Portuguese was not very extensive in those days, but more to the fact that my informant had no understanding of a foreigner's limitations and was quite unable to conceive of a man so dumb as not to know what a Caboclo was, it took some time to elicit the information that a Caboclo was an Indian. This was not strictly correct. A Caboclo is properly a person of mixed race, who shows strong traces of Indian ancestry; but it has been adopted as an unofficial name for any Brazilian, in recognition of the aboriginal strain in the majority of the Brazilian people. When Brazil declared war against Germany in 1942, because of the ruthless sinking of Brazilian ships with great loss of life, it was naturally an occasion that called out a flood of oratory; and I remember hearing various speakers say, "The Brazilian Caboclo will show those treacherous dogs that he can't be pushed around," or other words to the same effect. The speakers seemed proud to identify themselves as Caboclos.

The Indians that were encountered in Brazil by the first Portuguese settlers were not greatly dissimilar to those of North America, though they differed in many customs. They used stone implements, cultivated corn and manioc, were organized in tribes, the chief being called a morubixaba. They could count to five, numbers in excess of this number being generally referred to as tuba, which means "many". They worshiped the sun, moon and stars, and spoke of a Great Spirit, called Tupã. They were very brave and warlike, and gave the settlers a hard struggle before being overcome by superior weapons. They did not use stone pointed arrows, as our North American Indians, but made long arrows of reeds, sharpened and coated with some varnish-like substance to harden them. They were extremely skillful in the use of spears and arrows for hunting and fishing, or in war.

There are a few Indian reservations, but for the most part they have intermarried with the settlers, and the race, as such, has disappeared, except for those still savage tribes in the Amazon valley and Mato Grosso, and other points far in the interior, where they are still fairly abundant, and continue to live in the same conditions of savagery that the Portuguese encountered four hundred years ago. It is said that many of them still practice cannibalism, which was common among the Indians of Brazil at the time of the first settlement. Robert Southey wrote a voluminous history of Brazil, and recounts the story of two Portuguese explorers in the early days, who fell in with a tribe of Indians, and were hospitably received. One of them, who afterwards escaped, awoke one morning to see a leg of his companion suspended in a tree, while the rest of the carcass was already in process of preparation for the noonday meal.

A number of tribes were known, several of them still existent, the most important being the Tupí, and the related family Guarani. In some sections, due to gradual contact with the whites, they have absorbed a considerable degree of civilization, but many still live in complete savagery. Many missionaries have set out to Christianize them, with some success, but generally rather meager results. The Indian respects superior force, but a gospel of love makes little impression on him. He is likely to come to the conclusion that the missionary is afraid of him, and at the first opportunity to kill and devour him. The Brazilian government, in order to avoid clashes with the Indians, does not allow unrestricted exploration of the interior, exploration being limited to properly organized and approved expeditions.

Perhaps the most interesting and characteristic custom of the Indians of the upper Amazon region is that of shrinking and preserving human heads. I saw one such head in a museum in Belem, Para. It was very well preserved, and had it been of an acquaintance it might possibly have been recognized. I am told that there are a good many of these heads in existence in museums, and in the hands of private collectors, but it is no longer possible, or certainly not easy, to buy them.

The Brazilians think of their country as another "melting pot", and particularly so in the matter of the intermingling of races. The original Portuguese settlers were a mixed race to a certain extent, there being a considerable Moorish strain in

the Portuguese people. Perhaps this fact caused them to look with less disfavor on a union with a darker race. Many of the Indians were enslaved, and numbers of their women became the wives or concubines of the Portuguese settlers. Later on, African slaves were introduced, and the racial mixture went on, with three elements instead of two. In more recent times there has been a great deal of immigration from Europe, Germans and Italians predominating, and some Chinese and Japanese have come in, as well as Arabs and Jews. The different races are not evenly distributed, with the result that in some sections the people are predominantly Caucasian in appearance, whereas in other sections the Indian influence is very noticeable, and in still others, the African. But generally speaking, the mixture has been pretty thorough, only a small percentage of the people having the appearance of pure Caucasian stock; and one sees all shades of color, from the fairest blondes to pure African black.

The Brazilians believe, or profess to believe, that this is a good thing; and they talk of the emergence of a new Brazilian race, combining the best elements of all three principal racial stocks, and the other lesser racial components. Outsiders may shake their heads, but they are compelled to admire the realism with which the Brazilians face the situation bequeathed them by their ancestors; and it is an experiment worthy of careful observation, although it will probably take several centuries to bring it to full realization.

One often hears the statement made that there is no color line in Brazil. My observation is that there is a color line, but that it is very subtle, and different from that of North America, both in its basic assumption and in its application. There is also a strongly marked caste line, which crosses back and forth across the color line, helping to confuse the issue. This caste line is based on wealth, social position and the character of work done, if any. Roughly, we might say that the people are divided into the "gentleman" caste and the laboring caste, or the non-gentleman caste, as it includes beggars and thieves. The white collar worker maintains a tenuous hold on the "gentleman" caste. The badge of this caste is to wear shoes (the laborers may wear sandals or wooden clogs, or go barefooted) and a coat, in the case of the men, and never to be seen carrying any sort of package. I have seen a white collar worker

hand out his last cruzeiro to a porter for carrying his suitcase, with the air of a man of unlimited means. When a lady goes shopping, she must not carry any package larger than a cake of soap. The store will have the packages delivered. These customs, and to a certain extent the whole caste system, are breaking down in these years of change; but as recently as 1940 they were very strongly marked.

Now it so happens that negroes are often found in the "non-gentleman" class, and are little esteemed, not because of their color, but because of their social and economic position. There have been notable exceptions, however. Machado de Assis, generally considered Brazil's greatest novelist, showed plainly the negro strain in his ancestry, and there have been many people who were prominent and well considered socially, notwithstanding the fact that they were negroes. If a negro is good enough, either in his profession or because of wealth, he can be respected, and can move in the best circles; but his color is a handicap, which must be offset with other qualities for him to maintain a high social position.

We must not suppose at all that the Brazilians see no difference between a negro and a Caucasian. They think and speak of negroes naturally, and apparently without prejudice.

Negro, quando pinta,
Tem tres vezes trinta,

(A negro, when his head gets white,
Is ninety years old)

is a common proverb, and shows that there is no lack of recognition of racial differences. In my school work, I noticed that when we had a pure negro pupil the others were inclined to make fun of him, but not so much in the sense of classing him in an inferior race as pointing out a physical eccentricity, as they might ridicule extremely red hair, or an excess of freckles. But we had many pupils who were extremely dark, but with straight hair and finer features, suggesting more of the Indian strain, and these were sometimes teased about their color in the same way. I remember once when there was an almost total eclipse of the sun, and we had suspended classes to observe it, as it grew nearly dark some of the boys began to say, "Where is Alan?" (Alan was a very dark boy), pretending that they were unable to see him in the gloom. However, it was all in the spirit of good natured banter, and Alan did not seem to be at all offended.

There is some discrimination on the ground of color, however. A woman came into my office at the school one day, bringing a girl of twelve or thirteen years, whom she wished to matriculate on transfer from a school in a town about fifty miles away. On inquiry I discovered that the father was a lieutenant in the army, who had just been transferred to the local post. After checking on the transfer papers, I told the mother that we could take the girl, and she seemed pleased. The father, as I learned later, was very dark, the mother was black; but the girl shone like polished ebony. A few days afterward I learned that the mother had gone first to a girls' school in the community, and had been refused, on some pretext or other, but really for no reason except that the girl was black.

A white man would not ordinarily marry a black woman in Brazil, nor would a white woman normally accept a black suitor; but I have known cases of both these, and while neighbors marveled at their taste, they were not looked down on because of such a marriage. However, a white man may very readily marry a mulatto girl, or a negroid man may unhesitatingly marry a woman much more pronouncedly negroid than himself. I knew one case of a girl in a family that had been proud of being white, who was courted by a brilliant young man, desirable in every way except that his hair and features showed some traces of negro ancestry. The family hesitated for a time, but finally consented to the match, and when I last knew them they had been apparently very happily married for four or five years.

The word moleque, according to the dictionary, means a negro boy; but in the mind of the people it has come to be more of a distinction of social position and moral conduct than of race. Thus a street gamin who disregards all rules of mannerly behavior is called a moleque, but a well behaved boy, who shows evidence of home training in good manners, though he be black as ink is not considered a moleque. The conduct of a moleque is that that was only to be expected of negro boys in the days of slavery and afterwards, when they had no advantages of education; but it is the behavior rather than the race that determines whether a boy is a moleque or not.

In the old days it used to be the custom to arrange wet nurses for the babies

Pe de moleque

of the well to do families. Such a woman often continued to serve as the child's nurse after he was weaned, and was known as mãe preta, or mamãe preta (black mammy) to the child, negro women being universally used for this service. Such nurses were greatly beloved of their young charges, but were of course thought of as servants.

João de Albuquerque
There are a great many Indian legends known commonly among the Brazilians, but as most of them are concerned with plants, animals or places not familiar to non-Brazilian readers, it is hardly worth while to include them here. There are also stories of heroism on the part of Indians during the time of colonization, when the Portuguese settlers had to repel attacks by the French and the Dutch on various occasions. One Ararigboia, in 1565 led his Indian followers in swimming a branch of the bay in order to attack the fort in the infant colony of Rio de Janeiro, which had just been captured by the French. Succeeding in blowing up the powder magazine, he made victory possible for the Portuguese. In Pernambuco there was a chief named Tabira, of such valor that when on one occasion he was hit directly in the eye with an arrow, he calmly pulled out the arrow and continued the battle without interruption. Tabira succeeded in taking prisoner a Portuguese soldier named Jeronimo de Albuquerque, and was on the point of putting him to death, when his daughter, paralleling closely the story of Pocahontas, interceded for the prisoner, and persuaded her father to spare him. In gratitude to his benefactress, Jeronimo married the girl, thus cementing a permanent friendship between the Portuguese settlers and the Indians.